Burning coal is one of the dirtiest and most expensive ways to power our homes and businesses—and relying on out-of-state coal imports stunts the growth of the local clean energy economy and limits new job opportunities for Lakelanders. Lakeland’s own C.D. McIntosh coal-burning power plant can produce more than 150,000 tons per year of toxic waste, often called “coal ash.” This coal ash is stored onsite at McIntosh, right on Lake Parker, across from downtown Lakeland.

Storing coal ash so close to homes and businesses is especially worrisome because McIntosh already has documented groundwater contamination. The plant lacks basic protections to prevent this contamination from spreading. Worse, McIntosh is surrounded by sinkholes and is susceptible to the influence of sinkholes, which can rapidly spread the water contamination from coal ash to key sources of public drinking water.

McIntosh is one of the largest producers of coal ash in the state. Coal ash is created when coal is burned to produce electricity and it’s full of arsenic, mercury, lead and other dangerous chemicals and metals that pose a direct threat to our waterways and our health. Exposure to arsenic over long periods of time can lead to skin cancer, cancers of the bladder, kidney and lung, and diseases of the blood vessels of the legs and feet, and reproductive disorders.

At McIntosh, much of this toxic waste is kept in “sludge ponds” and unlined “landfills.” None of them are equipped to prevent dangerous chemicals from leaching into groundwater, which feeds local aquifers and public drinking water supplies.

In fact, high levels of arsenic have already been found in the groundwater right around these sludge ponds. Lakeland’s own monitors have repeatedly found chemicals typically found in coal ash in the groundwater at McIntosh. Even after the monitoring network was dramatically scaled back, Lakeland continues to detect toxic chemicals, such as arsenic, at levels that far exceed normal background levels.

McIntosh is an unstable area that is under the influence of sinkholes that can accelerate the leaching of dangerous pollutants into our water. There is a sinkhole right in the center of the McIntosh plant and many, many more sinkholes all around the plant. The influence of sinkholes can convey the dangerous chemicals from the coal ash stored at the plant even more rapidly into the groundwater on which Lakeland families and businesses rely.
That’s why, we urge Lakeland Electric to cease burning coal at the C.D. McIntosh, Jr. power plant and to clean up the coal ash pits posing a threat to our community. The coal ash should be stored in a lined landfill on stable ground. It’s time for Lakeland Electric to focus on the health of our community, and it’s time for Lakeland leaders to invest in the economic well being of our local families and businesses.

MOVING LAKELAND OFF OF COAL BURNING WILL:

• Reduce Lakeland Electric’s exposure to multi-million dollar regulatory compliance costs to bring its operation in line with new public health and environmental protection standards;

• Re-direct money that would otherwise go to out-of-state coal imports to local clean energy investments that will save local families and local businesses money, grow local jobs and property values, and expand customers’ choices.

• Protect our community’s health and the environment from the serious harms associated with coal-burning pollution, including groundwater contamination, increased risk of respiratory illnesses such as asthma, and climate disruption caused by greenhouse gases from burning fossil fuels.

Cleaning up coal ash will protect our communities and our water from toxic chemicals.

ENDNOTES

1 Clean Jobs Florida, http://cleanjobsflorida.com